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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#) [QA](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI SUNNI ENDOWMENT HEAD PLANS NEW RELIGIOUS
ORGANIZATION

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha,
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Sheikh Ahmed Abdul Ghafour al-Samarraie, head of the Sunni Endowment, told Poloffs on February 12 that he plans to start a new Sunni religious organization that will be a moderate alternative to the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS). He predicts that approximately ninety percent of the AMS will follow him to his new organization. Samarraie also discussed the targeting of Sunni imams and mosques since the bombing in Samarra last year, his desire to reopen Sunni mosques in Huriya, and his frustration with the lack of GOI support to Anbar. END SUMMARY.

Sunni Religious Targets Hard Hit Since Samarra

12. (C) Samarraie said that since the mosque bombing in Samarra last February, 85 Sunni mosques have been attacked and over 200 Sunni scholars and imams have been kidnapped and/or killed. He estimated that two-thirds of these were taken by militias, while the remaining third were taken by Al-Qaeda. In addition, none of the Sunni Waqf employees kidnapped from October-December 2006 have been found. On a personal note, he said that his young nephew was attacked by Al Qaeda while leaving class last November, and is still recovering in an Amman hospital.

Reopening Sunni Mosques in Sadr City and Huriya

13. (C) Samarraie discussed the reopening of a Sunni mosque in Sadr City on February 10. Samarraie said that contrary to press reports, moderate Shia sheikhs from Sadr City - not Sadrists - approached him for help in reopening the Haleem Sadia mosque. In the wake of JAM's mass exodus from Sadr City "escaping from the Baghdad security plan," these sheikhs approached him and suggested the initiative. While he supported it in a press statement, he said refused to appoint an imam or staff to the mosque or attend the ceremony, as he could not guarantee their safety, nor the safe return of Sunni residents to Sadr City.

14. (C) Samarraie opined that the re-opening Sunni mosques in Sadr City (and returning displaced Sunni residents to their homes there) is a lost cause, and that it would be better for the Shia to take them over. Samarraie said he is seeking support for restoring Sunni mosques in Huriya, in northwestern Baghdad. According to Samarraie, Jaysh al-Madhi (JAM), with Iraqi Army knowledge, occupied 13 Sunni mosques in the neighborhood. Samarraie said he is planning on holding a conference in Huriya to work out an agreement to allow Sunnis to return to the area. He added he appeared on television asking for the GOI to enforce the law and make illegal residents leave the neighborhood.

Plans to Establish an Alternative to the AMS

15. (C) Samarraie said that he intends to establish a new Sunni religious organization that would be a moderate alternative to the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS). He has appointed Mahmoud Sommadaie (his deputy at the Endowment who was also in attendance at the meeting) as the head of the preparatory committee for the conference. (Note: Sommadaie is the Imam of Um Al Kurra Mosque, the largest Sunni mosque in Baghdad. He was once a prominent member of the AMS, but has since broken from the organization. Sommadaie is also a member of the National Reconciliation Commission. End note.)

16. (C) Samarraie said he hoped to bring together 200 moderate Sunni scholars in Amman and establish the founding principles for the new organization. He noted that the Jordanian government was very slow in processing the necessary permits for the conference, and asked for USG help in pressing Jordan for assistance in this matter. Samarraie predicted that ninety percent of the AMS's members would follow him to this new organization. He said that even the AMS spokesman Mohammad Ayyash called him and gave him a promise of support.

17. (C) Samarraie said the GOI knows of and approves of his plans. He stressed he "has the resources" to pay for the conference. He told poloff that Qatar has lent great financial support to Harith Al-Dari and the AMS, and must be convinced to support this moderate alternative. Regarding the broader issue of regional aid to Iraq, Samarraie said the UAE has promised to provide food, blankets, and ambulances, and the Red Cross in Amman has also promised to help Iraq.

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He said Saudi Arabia has promised financial resources, but has not delivered.

Samarraie on Anbar

18. (C) On Anbar, Samarraie said he had lunch with Sheikh Sittar Abu Risha, leader of the Anbar Salvation Council, in Amman two days ago. He said that Sheikh Sittar's efforts in Anbar were a positive development. He said Sittar told him that he has recruited 16,000 men for the Iraqi police, and PM Nuri al-Maliki only sent them 1,000 weapons, and claimed he did not have any more to give. This example, Samarraie argued, showed that the PM was not allowing Sunnis to fight back in Anbar. Samarraie said he is "convinced" that the PM does not want to get rid of AQI in Sunni areas. He opined that Maliki is keeping the Sunnis out of the Iraqi Security forces to allow JAM to move into Sunni areas. Additionally, Iran is supporting AQI so the Iranian army can enter Iraq and annex land, according to Samarraie.

19. (C) Comment: Samarraie's tone in discussing Anbar showed strong support for Sheikh Sittar's point of view. This burgeoning alliance makes sense, given that AMS head Harith Al-Dari and Sheikh Abd Al Sittar are enemies. (Note: Sittar was the only prominent Sunni figure who came out publicly in support of the PM's announced arrest warrant against Al Dari for inciting terrorism in December of 2006. End note.) Of note as well is Samarraie's claim that Dr. Thamer, the AMS head in Anbar, contacted him and expressed his support. As Samarraie lobbies the Sunnis for support on his new organization, poloffs will continue to monitor what, if any cooperative relationship develops between Al-Sittar, the Anbar Salvation Council and Sheikh Samarraie
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